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Corporate social responsibility and employer attractiveness: Perspectives of prospective jobseekers in Ghana

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Abstract

This article explores the importance that prospective jobseekers attach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of firms and how their CSR perceptions may translate into their willingness to work for CSR-practising firms. The study employed correlations, as well as multiple and hierarchical regressions to analyse data collected from 603 respondents. CSR perception was found to be positively related to attraction to working for CSR-practising firms. Male respondents attached higher importance to firms' engagement in CSR while respondents from the African continent attached higher importance to firms' engagement in CSR than respondents from other continents, with the exception of Australia.

1. Introduction

Firms all over the world are becoming increasingly aware of the need to attract, recruit, and retain knowledgeable employees in order to sustain their desired levels of performance (Greening & Turban, 2000; Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). It has been argued that a match between jobseekers' personal values and those of their prospective employers provide an indication of successful job entry and placement (Judge & Bretz, 1992). For this reason, companies are now deliberately adopting employer attractiveness (EA) strategies to be able them to entice and retain talented employees (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2008). Ray (2006) defines EA as the degree to which a potential applicant has interest in pursuing employment opportunities with an organisation on the basis of the expected benefits that he or she believes to they will be able to enjoy in working for the organisation.

In spite of the growing importance of EA strategies to recruitment and organisational performance, relatively little is known about which specific factors determine potential applicants' attraction to an employer (Turban & Greening, 1997; Greening & Turban, 2000; Albinger & Freeman, 2000). Some scholars suggest that potential employees may not be interested merely in financial gains, but also in the emotional and psychological satisfaction that corporate image may provide them (Turban & Keon, 1993; Turban, 2001). Thus, organisations are shifting their focus from monetary incentives to nonmonetary factors such as "company values" and enhanced organisational reputation and image in order to attract highly qualified people (Ray, 2006). In line with this thinking, some recent studies have suggested a link between companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and their attractiveness as employers to talented graduates (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Waring & Lewer, 2004; Arpan, 2005). The emerging understanding is that organisations that align their internal operations with changes in the environment through CSR practices tend to improve their attractiveness amongst jobseekers (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Turban & Greening, 1997).

There are, however, some limitations in the insight provided by the available literature in this area. Firstly, the social and economic contexts within which companies operate have not been explicitly introduced into the existing investigations. As Albinger and Freeman (2000) argue, jobseekers with high levels of job choice may pay greater attention to CSR practices than jobseekers who have difficulties in finding jobs. They found in their study of job-seeking populations in a "large Midwestern city" in the U.S.A. that as job choice increases, the strength of the relationship between jobseekers' perceptions of an organisation's attractiveness as an employer and its corporate social performance tends to increase. Secondly, the few empirical investigations on the subject have been done in North America and Western Europe. Thus, despite the growing evidence that companies in high-growth economic sectors in developing countries (including Africa) are faced with a growing shortage of middle- and top-level managers to run the increasing number of businesses (Harding, 2011; Maritz, 2012), issues of organisation-person fit in general, and the link between CSR practices and their role in attracting potential employees have not received any research attention in these parts of the world. Recent CSR-related studies in Africa (e.g. Visser, 2005; Atuguba & Dowuna-Hammond, 2006; Dawkins & Ngunjiri, 2008; Ofori & Wilson, 2010; and Dashwood & Puplampu, 2010), for example, have focused on the nature of CSR practices and not explored the link between CSR practices and employer attractiveness.

The above observations provide some justification for the study reported in the present article. The study sought to understand the link between CSR practices and the attractiveness of employers to prospective jobseekers in Ghana. To the extent that Ghana has witnessed a high rate of economic growth in recent years (14.6% in 2011), there seems to be growing anecdotal evidence to suggest that there have been shortages in qualified candidates for entry, mid-level, and top management positions. Companies located in the country may therefore need to develop innovative strategies to make themselves attractive to potential top candidates. In this regard, CSR practices may become a useful instrument. The present study therefore examines the extent to which

Ghanaian companies will enhance their attractiveness as employers through specific CSR practices. The study also makes two additional contributions to the contemporary literature. First, by extending the limited but growing body of empirical knowledge about the link between CSR and employer attractiveness to an African context, the study may strengthen the generalisability of the results from earlier studies. Second, we investigate the moderating effects of individual characteristics on the relationship between CSR perceptions of prospective jobseekers and the attractiveness of CSR-practising firms as employers.

The structure of the rest of the article is as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of previous studies on the subject as a basis for developing a conceptual model and hypotheses for the study. We then discuss the methodology we adopted for this study. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of our findings. The final section of the article examines the implications of our results for company strategies and future research.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

The notion of person–organisation (P–O) fit has long been important to researchers in organisational behaviour (Ray, 2006). The general understanding provided by P–O studies is that the subjective assessments of the match between jobseekers' own values and characteristics and those of the job and organisation, influence initial attraction to the organisation. If the potential candidates apply for the jobs, their decision to go through the selection process will also be guided by this perception (Carless, 2005). Applicants to management positions in particular have been found to be drawn to organisations that provide them with psychological motivational packages and/or exhibit values that are consistent with their personal values (Turban & Keon, 1993; Turban, 2001). Verquer *et al.* (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of the available published studies in person–organisation fit and concluded that the field “appears to be promising as an important determinant of employee attitudes, but there are several intriguing issues yet to be understood” (p. 487). An earlier study by Kristof (1996), defined the construct as “compatibility between people and organisations that occurs when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both” (pp. 4-5). The fit between people and organisations has been found to impact employees' job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and turnover intentions. That is, where the level of compatibility between employees' personal values and values endorsed by the organisation is high, this will result in a reduction of role stressors such as role ambiguity and conflict because it will facilitate employees' understanding of their interpersonal environment (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). But if the compatibility is low, this may produce lethargic and unmotivated employees (Verquer *et al.*, 2003).

Some recent studies have shown that CSR practices are adopted by some firms as a means of enhancing their identities and attractiveness to prospective employees, especially top managers (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Ray, 2006; Tucker, 2009). It has also been suggested that some categories of university students select future employers on

the basis of their social profiles. For example, Dolan (1997) showed that MBA students in his study were willing to forego some compensation in order to be affiliated with a socially responsible organisation. Turban and Greening (1997) also found in their study that organisations that are rated higher in CSR were perceived to have better reputations and were considered as more attractive employers.

This perspective is captured in the signalling theory and social identity theory (Epstein, 1987). That is, signals that socially responsible behaviours send out to stakeholders will determine their perception of the company. The more positive the signs, the more attractive the company will be to a jobseeker that accords significance to these behaviours. Similarly, social identity theory examines the impact of group membership on self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). If company CSR practices are compatible with prospective employees' values, such behaviours are likely to enhance the perceptions that the jobseekers have of the company and will improve their prospects of staying with the company after securing the job (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Sen *et al.*, 2006).

We have summarised the discussions above into a conceptual model to guide the empirical investigations conducted in this article. The model is schematically presented in Figure 1 for a quick overview. It also undergirds the three hypotheses tested in the study.

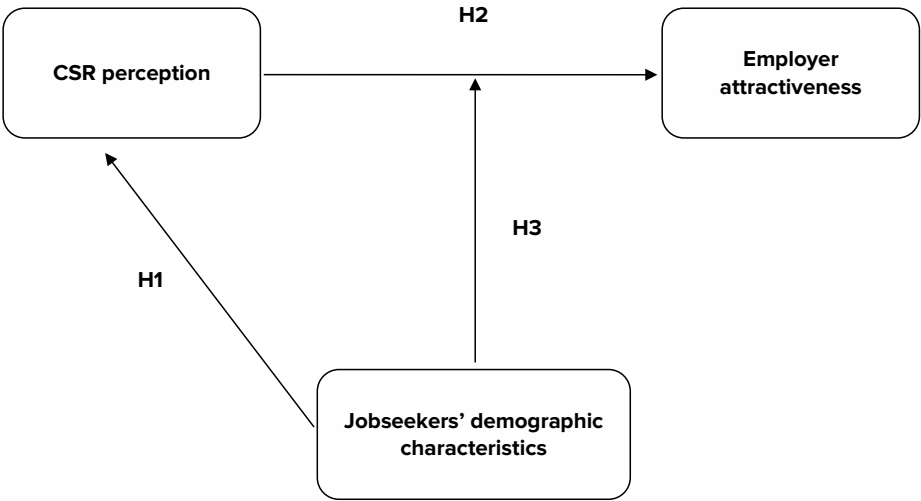


Figure 1: The link between CSR perception and employer attractiveness

We have noted that various empirical investigations have been conducted linking CSR to employer attractiveness. For example, Greening and Turban (2000) “found that prospective job applicants are more likely to pursue jobs from socially responsible firms” (p. 254). Other studies have however shown that demographic characteristics such as gender, type, and level of education as well as profession can impact stakeholders' attitude to different CSR dimensions (Tse & Au, 1997). For example, Sankaran and Bui (2003) found that students from non-business majors tended to be more ethical than business majors. Similarly, Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005) found that students from

business and technology majors displayed more individualistic values, such as power, than other categories of students. Furthermore, Terpstra *et al.* (1993) found that senior students were less ethical than junior students, and Elias (2004) has found that younger students were more sensitive to CSR. Several studies have also identified gender as having a significant impact on the values that people subscribe to and expect companies to practise. Scholars such as Chonko and Hunt (1985), Arlow (1991) as well as Ruegger and King (1992) have shown that women generally subscribe more to ethical values than men. Similar findings have been reported by Ameen *et al.* (1996), Okleshen and Hoyt (1996), as well as Burton and Hegarty (1999).

Based on the foregoing discussions, we hypothesise as follows:

| | |
|----|---|
| H1 | Jobseeker demographic characteristics will affect their perception of the CSR practices of firms in Ghana. |
| H2 | Jobseekers who have a favourable perception of CSR practices of organisations will be more attracted to such organisations as prospective employers. |
| H3 | Demographic characteristics of jobseekers in Ghana will moderate their perception of the attractiveness of employers based on prospective employers' CSR practices. |

3. Methodology

A survey was conducted using semi-structured questionnaires as the research instrument. According to Ghauri and Grouhang (2005), a survey is an effective tool to get opinions, attitudes, and descriptions as well as for getting cause-and-effect relationships. Following Sen *et al.* (2006), questionnaires were distributed to students of all levels at the University of Ghana. Six hundred and three (603) returned questionnaires were deemed usable for the purposes of the study and were thus employed in the analysis.

The University of Ghana is the largest and oldest public university in Ghana. Students of the University were appropriate to be used as a study sample firstly because employer attractiveness studies generally examine university students since many organisations are likely to hire from pools of graduating students (Evans & Davis, 2008). Similar populations have therefore been employed in studies investigating employer attractiveness within the CSR context (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Sen *et al.*, 2006; Zhang & Gowan, 2012). Additionally, being the largest university in the country with a student population of nearly 45 000 from across all of Ghana and more than 70 countries and territories, University of Ghana was envisaged to provide the study with the highest level of diversity in individual characteristics as needed for a study of this nature. Additionally, given that the seeming shortage in human resource in Africa was for middle-management positions, the more educated and hence skilled labour provided by universities was deemed appropriate for this study.

The data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Based on Carroll's (1979) conceptualisation of CSR, the study employed a four-item scale to measure both the CSR and employer attractiveness (EA) constructs. Carroll's (1979) conceptualisation of CSR is one of the well-endorsed conceptualisations in the contemporary CSR literature.

The model differentiates between four types of corporate social responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary/philanthropic. The study adapted Carroll’s (1979) four-part conceptualisation given that it is one of the most robust and widely cited conceptualisations (Jamali, 2008; Crane & Matten, 2004). The four-item scales had four questions that each represented one of the four dimensions of CSR; that is, economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic CSR. Items such as “I believe that a company must behave according to societal standards and ethical norms, even if not required by law” were employed to measure CSR perception. Similarly, employer attractiveness was also measured to reflect respondents’ evaluation of the attractiveness of CSR-practising firms as prospective employers. We therefore employed a four-item scale with items such as: “I consider companies with high economic performance as the most attractive employers”. All items were measured using a seven-point (Likert type) scale anchored at “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”. The CSR perception construct and the employer attractiveness construct had Chronbach’s alpha reliability scores of 0.63 and 0.62 respectively, both indicating acceptable reliability for an exploratory study of this nature (Nunnally, 1978; Hair *et al.*, 2006).

4. Presentation and discussion of findings

The sample was made up of largely undergraduate students (98%), predominantly from the continent of Africa (82%). The majority of the students (92%) were within the age range of 16-25 years, were males (54%), and had some form of work experience (65.5%). On the whole, on a scale of 1 to 7, respondents had a mean score of 5.37 and 5.52 for CSR perception and employer attractiveness respectively. Details of the respondents’ demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

| Demography | Percentage | Demography | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Gender | | Work experience | |
| Female | 45.9 | no experience | 34.5 |
| Male | 54.1 | below 5 years | 41.1 |
| Age ^a | | between 5 and 10 years | 20.6 |
| 16-25 years | 92.0 | 10 years and above | 3.8 |
| 26-35 years | 7.7 | Continent of origin ^c | |
| 36-45 years | 0.3 | Africa | 82.0 |
| Degree ^b | | Europe | 4.3 |
| Undergraduate | 98.0 | North America | 10.5 |
| Master's Degree | 2.0 | South America | 0.8 |
| | | Asia | 2.2 |
| | | Australia | 0.2 |
| ^a three cases missing | | ^c two cases missing | |
| ^b one case missing | | | |

Table 2: Results of correlation analysis

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|----------|--------|----------|---------|----------|--------|---------|--------|----------|--------|----|
| 1 CSR perception | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Employer attractiveness | 0.222** | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 16-25 | -0.072 | -0.057 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 26-35 | 0.088* | 0.067 | -0.945** | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 36-45 | 0.018 | -0.016 | -0.190** | -0.017 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 no experience | -0.075 | 0.055 | 0.108** | -0.117** | -0.042 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 below 5 years | 0.118** | -0.064 | 0.097* | -0.075 | -0.048 | -0.607** | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 between 5 and 10 years | -0.044 | 0.009 | -0.126** | 0.132** | 0.042 | -0.369** | -0.425** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 above 10 years | -0.022 | 0.011 | -0.251** | 0.204** | 0.139** | -0.145** | -0.166** | -0.101* | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 Africa | 0.441** | 0.101* | -0.051 | 0.039 | 0.027 | 0.207** | -0.042 | -0.185** | -0.018 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 11 Europe | -0.210** | -0.099* | 0.006 | 0.001 | -0.012 | -0.120** | 0.055 | 0.094* | -0.042 | -0.449** | - | | | | | | | |
| 12 North America | -0.357** | -0.061 | 0.045 | -0.037 | -0.020 | -0.179** | 0.023 | 0.175** | 0.017 | -0.723** | -0.073 | - | | | | | | |
| 13 South America | -0.044 | 0.025 | 0.028 | -0.026 | -0.005 | 0.011 | -0.002 | -0.001 | -0.018 | -0.194** | -0.019 | -0.031 | - | | | | | |
| 14 Asia | -0.071 | 0.031 | 0.045 | -0.043 | -0.009 | -0.012 | -0.008 | -0.019 | 0.090* | -0.314** | -0.032 | -0.051 | -0.014 | - | | | | |
| 15 Australia | -0.013 | -0.123** | -0.134** | 0.142** | -0.002 | -0.030 | -0.034 | 0.080* | -0.008 | -0.086* | -0.009 | -0.014 | -0.004 | -0.006 | - | | | |
| 16 Christian | 0.054 | 0.034 | 0.015 | -0.033 | 0.034 | 0.159** | 0.069 | -0.250** | -0.043 | 0.327** | -0.101* | -0.287** | -0.073 | -0.097* | 0.024 | - | | |
| 17 Islam | 0.159** | 0.055 | -0.005 | 0.016 | -0.021 | -0.049 | -0.053 | 0.130** | -0.016 | 0.128** | -0.024 | -0.122** | -0.033 | -0.017 | -0.015 | -0.611** | - | |
| 18 Other | 0.037 | 0.055 | 0.003 | 0.003 | -0.012 | -0.063 | -0.055 | 0.100* | 0.089* | -0.117** | -0.044 | 0.092* | 0.073 | 0.141** | -0.008 | -0.357** | -0.074 | - |

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 presents bivariate correlations for the variables included in the analyses. From Table 2, originating from the continents of Europe and North America, were negatively and significantly correlated to CSR perception, that is, the level to which individuals believe CSR practices of firms are important. However, being between the ages of 26 and 35, having work experience of below five years, originating from the African continent, belonging to the Islamic religion, and being a male were positively and significantly correlated with individuals' perceptions of firms' engagement in CSR. All the preceding variables were significantly correlated at 1%, except for being between the ages of 26 and 35 years which was significant at 5%. In relation to individuals' perception of the attractiveness of CSR-practising firms as potential employers, respondents with content of origin as Europe and Australia were negatively and significantly correlated with employer attractiveness; Australia was significant at 1% while Europe was significant at 5%. Respondents with continent of origin as Africa were positively and significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) correlated with employer attractiveness. CSR perception was also positively correlated with employer attractiveness and significant at 1%. The preceding results of the preliminary correlation analysis were further explored through multiple regression analyses.

To address hypothesis one (H1), a regression analysis was run with CSR perception of respondents as the dependent variable and the demographic characteristics of the respondents as the independent variables. The overall model was significant at $p < 0.01$ with $R^2 = 25.8$ and adjusted $R^2 = 24.1$, indicating that the demographic variables employed in the analysis explain at least 24.1% of the variance in individuals' perceptions of firms' engagement in CSR as important. Furthermore, results from the regression analysis (Table 3) indicate that demographic variables related to work experience, continent of origin, and gender were significant predictors of individual CSR perceptions amongst students in Ghana. Variables related to age, religion and degree the respondent was currently studying for were not found to be significant predictors of individual students' CSR perceptions.

In more specific terms, the results indicate that respondents who had below five years ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) or between 5 to 10 years ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$) of work experience had significantly higher perceptions of firms' engagement in CSR than the reference group: respondents who had no work experience. However respondents who had 10 or more years of work experience had CSR perceptions that were not significantly different from respondents who had no work experience. The alternating increase and decrease in CSR perceptions with respect to work experience may indicate possible interaction of work experience with other factors not covered in this study and as such makes it quite difficult to offer any satisfactory explanation within the context of this study. In relation to continent of origin, as indicated in Table 3, respondents from Europe and North America had β -coefficient values of -0.26 and -0.40 respectively, significant at less than 1% each, while respondents from South America and Asia had β -coefficient values of -0.07 and -0.09 respectively, significant at 5%. Having Australia as continent of origin however had β -coefficient value of -0.04 which was not significant. The results indicate that respondents from Europe, North America, South America and Asia who

were students in Ghana attached less importance to firms' engagement in CSR as compared to respondents from the African context. The finding does not however mean that respondents from the other continents do not consider CSR activities as important but that their perception of importance of these activities may just be less than those of the respondents from the African continent.

Such findings may be explained by the general scepticism that exists against firms' engagement in CSR (Birth *et al.*, 2008; Eweje, 2007; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009; Illia *et al.*, 2013). This scepticism is likely to be more profound amongst respondents from more developed continents where stakeholders may be overwhelmed with firms' continuous communication of their CSR engagements and which can create increased suspicion of "green washing" amongst respondents from such continents (Parguel *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, compared to continents such as Europe and North America, Africans practise a more collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1985) that is likely to put higher value on philanthropic initiatives (Visser, 2005; Eweje, 2007) usually aimed at the less privileged in society. Furthermore, CSR activities of firms, especially multinational firms in Africa, are expected to serve as contributor to the development agenda of African countries through provision of jobs, and the transfer of technology and infrastructural development including the building of hospitals and schools especially in host communities (Amaewhule, 1997; Holme & Watts, 2000).

Given the benefits that CSR is expected to hold for Africans and the higher scepticism that may exist on the side of respondents from more developed continents, Africans seem more likely to attach higher importance to firms' practice of economic, philanthropic/discretionary and ethical CSR. This is especially so because philanthropic actions of giving to the less privileged or contributing to infrastructural development of societies are expected of firms operating in Africa (Amaewhule, 1997; Holme & Watts, 2000; Eweje, 2007) and hence may qualify to be classified as ethical responsibilities (Carroll, 1979) within the African context. In effect, Africans may indeed attach more importance to firms' practice of CSR than respondents from the other more developed continents. Furthermore, the difference in beta coefficients and significance levels amongst the continents also seem to suggest that respondents from relatively more developed continents place less importance on CSR practices of firms as compared to relatively less developed continents.

Male students in Ghana, according to the results of the analysis, expressed a significantly higher belief in the need for firms to engage in CSR as compared to their female counterparts. According to Table 3, CSR perception amongst males was 0.115 higher compared to females; significant at 1%. This result contradicts the findings of other studies (Arlow, 1991; Ruegger & King, 1992; Okleshen & Hoyt, 1996; Burton & Hegarty, 1999). However, given that respondents for this study were largely Africans (82%), the higher CSR perception on the part of the male respondents may be due to the dominant male ideology within the African context in which males seem to have greater social, political, and economic recognition than their female counterparts (Obbo, 1976; Mwale, 2002). This male-dominated societal system may lead to the males being more assertive than females on issues of social, political, and economic interest such as firms'

responsibility to society, and thus may likely account for male respondents in this study being more expressive of their expectancy of firms in relation to firms' performance of corporate social responsibility.

Table 3: Results of multiple regressions

| Independent variable | CSR perception | | | Employer attractiveness | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|--------|-------|
| | Beta | t | Sig. | Beta | t | Sig. |
| (Constant) | | 14.885 | 0.000 | | 10.951 | 0.000 |
| CSR perception | | | | 0.234 | 5.114 | 0.000 |
| Age | | | | | | |
| 26-35 | 0.061 | 1.522 | 0.128 | 0.067 | 1.523 | 0.128 |
| 36-45 | 0.023 | 0.642 | 0.521 | -0.020 | -0.507 | 0.612 |
| Work experience | | | | | | |
| below 5 years | 0.201 | 4.900 | 0.000 | -0.105 | -2.256 | 0.024 |
| between 5 and 10 years | 0.118 | 2.736 | 0.006 | -0.019 | -0.391 | 0.696 |
| above 10 years | -0.006 | -0.149 | 0.882 | -0.019 | -0.445 | 0.656 |
| Continent of origin | | | | | | |
| Europe | -0.256 | -6.865 | 0.000 | -0.021 | -0.478 | 0.633 |
| North America | -0.400 | -9.412 | 0.000 | 0.079 | 1.555 | 0.120 |
| South America | -0.072 | -1.981 | 0.048 | 0.051 | 1.253 | 0.211 |
| Asia | -0.086 | -2.342 | 0.019 | 0.061 | 1.477 | 0.140 |
| Australia | -0.035 | -0.959 | 0.338 | -0.132 | -3.293 | 0.001 |
| Religion | | | | | | |
| Christian | -0.051 | -0.938 | 0.348 | 0.117 | 1.949 | 0.052 |
| Islam | 0.071 | 1.404 | 0.161 | 0.092 | 1.633 | 0.103 |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| (female = 0, male = 1) | 0.115 | 3.142 | 0.002 | 0.004 | 0.104 | 0.917 |
| Degree currently studying for | | | | | | |
| (MBA = 0, bachelor's = 1) | -0.015 | -0.395 | 0.693 | -0.014 | -0.322 | 0.747 |

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was also tested using multiple regression analysis with employer attractiveness as the dependent variable and CSR perception as the predictor. The demographic variables were also included in the analysis. The overall model was significant at 1% with $R^2=0.09$ and adjusted $R^2=0.07$. As hypothesised, CSR perception had a positive beta coefficient of 0.23 and was significant at 1%, indicating that an increase in the importance attached to firms' engagement in CSR by a respondent increases the respondent's attraction to being employed with CSR-practising firms. This result supports earlier results of positive and significant correlation between CSR perception and employer attractiveness as indicated in Table 2 ($r=0.22$, $p<0.01$) and also supports the findings of other studies (e.g. Turban & Greening, 1997; Greening & Turban, 2000; Sen *et al.*, 2006) that firms' engagement in CSR has a potential of attracting prospective employees. However, the seemingly low variance in the CSR-based employer attractiveness explained by individuals' CSR perception and other demographic variables

may indicate that respondents' attraction to working for firms based on their practice of CSR may be based on more factors other than their perceptions of CSR and their demographic characteristics; possibly, job characteristics may be paramount. Indeed, Thomas and Wise (1999) found that prospective employees in their study ranked job and organisational characteristics as more important than diversity programmes – a type of CSR – in the choice of an organisation. Additionally, research indicates that consumers are not willing to trade the quality of goods for the CSR activities by firms (Haigh & Brubaker, 2010; Guzman & Becker-Olsen, 2010). These findings therefore seem to point to the fact that CSR activities of firms will not be exchanged for the core characteristics of firms' offerings such as jobs or products in evaluations by individual stakeholders unless the CSR practice contributes to the improvement of the job offering, e.g. employee skill-improvement programmes and fair wages.

Although not hypothesised, having work experience of five years and below and having Australia as continent of origin were significant negative predictors of employer attractiveness based on CSR. Having work experience of five years and below ($\beta = -0.10$, $p < 0.05$) was significant at 5% while being from the continent of Australia ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.01$) was significant at 1%. The results indicate that compared to students who had no work experience, students with five years or less of work experience were less likely to choose a firm to work with based on firms' CSR performance. These results may be attributed to the fact that items employed in measuring CSR did not include internal CSR measures such as working conditions and employee skills-development activities. As such, results may point to the fact that students with prior work experience may be less idealistic in their perception of employer attractiveness. This means they may be less attracted to job offerings of firms based solely on CSR activities, but may rather be more concerned with other internal conditions they may be exposed to while working with the firms.

To test hypothesis three (H3), we employed a hierarchical regression. The hierarchical regression was undertaken in two steps. In the first step, CSR perception and the various demographic factors were entered into the model as predictors of employer attractiveness while in the second step the interaction terms representing each demographic factors' interaction with CSR were entered as predictors of employer attractiveness. The significance of the interaction was examined using the R-squared change (ΔR^2). The results indicated that the change in R-squared as a result of the addition of interaction variables in step two was not significant at 95% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.018$, Sig. F Change = 0.59) indicating that although some demographic variables were significant predictors of CSR perception, they did not significantly moderate the effect of individuals' CSR perception on employer attractiveness of CSR-practising firms. The demographic factors investigated in this study therefore do not seem to interact with CSR perceptions in predicting respondents' attraction to being employed with firms based on firms' engagement in CSR activities. Therefore, it can be said that although CSR perception differed across some demographic characteristic and also significantly affected employer attractiveness amongst students in Ghana, differences in demographic characteristics of the students do not significantly affect the level to which their CSR perceptions translate into attraction to firms' job

offerings based on firms' engagement in CSR practices. As such, students in Ghana, for example, who attach the same level of importance to the CSR engagement of firms, are likely to have the same level of attraction to working for firms that practise CSR whether they are male or female.

Table 4: Results of hierarchical regressions

| Independent variables | Model 1 ^a | | | Model 2 ^b | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|
| | Beta | t | Sig. | Beta | t | Sig. |
| Step 1 | | | | | | |
| (Constant) | | 10.951 | 0.000 | | 2.152 | 0.032 |
| CSR perception | 0.234 | 5.114 | 0.000 | 0.166 | 0.370 | 0.712 |
| 26-35 | 0.067 | 1.523 | 0.128 | 0.008 | 0.024 | 0.981 |
| 36-45 | -0.020 | -0.507 | 0.612 | -0.298 | -0.323 | 0.747 |
| below 5 years | -0.105 | -2.256 | 0.024 | -0.486 | -2.094 | 0.037 |
| between 5 and 10 years | -0.019 | -0.391 | 0.696 | -0.213 | -0.937 | 0.349 |
| above 10 years | -0.019 | -0.445 | 0.656 | -0.089 | -0.424 | 0.672 |
| Europe | -0.021 | -0.478 | 0.633 | 0.309 | 1.751 | 0.080 |
| North America | 0.079 | 1.555 | 0.120 | -0.016 | -0.080 | 0.937 |
| South America | 0.051 | 1.253 | 0.211 | -0.070 | -0.436 | 0.663 |
| Asia | 0.061 | 1.477 | 0.140 | 0.165 | 0.914 | 0.361 |
| Australia | -0.132 | -3.293 | 0.001 | -0.129 | -3.169 | 0.002 |
| Christian | 0.117 | 1.949 | 0.052 | 0.128 | 0.509 | 0.611 |
| Islam | 0.092 | 1.633 | 0.103 | -0.095 | -0.335 | 0.737 |
| Gender | 0.004 | 0.104 | 0.917 | -0.242 | -1.188 | 0.235 |
| Degree currently studying for | -0.014 | -0.322 | 0.747 | 0.033 | 0.113 | 0.910 |
| Step 2 Interaction terms | | | | | | |
| 26-35 years X CSR | | | | 0.057 | 0.161 | 0.872 |
| 36-45years X CSR | | | | 0.278 | 0.302 | 0.763 |
| below 5 years X CSR | | | | 0.396 | 1.672 | 0.095 |
| between 5 and 10 years X CSR | | | | 0.197 | 0.862 | 0.389 |
| above 10 years X CSR | | | | 0.080 | 0.383 | 0.702 |
| Europe X CSR | | | | -0.332 | -1.960 | 0.051 |
| North America X CSR | | | | 0.110 | 0.589 | 0.556 |
| South America X CSR | | | | 0.123 | 0.775 | 0.439 |
| Asia X CSR | | | | -0.109 | -0.606 | 0.545 |
| Christian X CSR | | | | -0.011 | -0.040 | 0.968 |
| Islam X CSR | | | | 0.188 | 0.626 | 0.531 |
| Gender X CSR | | | | 0.269 | 1.269 | 0.205 |
| Degree X CSR | | | | -0.080 | -0.156 | 0.876 |
| ^a For model 1 | R ² = 0.90 | Adj. R ² = 0.066 | ΔR ² = 0.090 | Sig. F Change = 0.000 | | |
| ^b For model 2 | R ² = 0.107 | Adj. R ² = 0.064 | ΔR ² = 0.018 | Sig. F Change = 0.587 | | |

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study represents one of the first attempts to explore the role of demographic characteristics in affecting individuals' perceptions of firms' engagement in CSR as well as the role of these CSR perceptions in affecting the attractiveness of prospective employers within the African context. The study thus sought to explore the effect of various demographic factors on the CSR perception of students in the largest university in Ghana. It also sought to investigate the effect of CSR perception of students on their perception of attractiveness of CSR-practising firms as prospective employers while also investigating the moderating effects of the students' demographic characteristics on the relationship between their CSR perception and their attraction to working with firms based on the practice of CSR.

The results of the study indicate that respondents originating from other continents who were students in Ghana attached less importance to firms' engagement in CSR activities compared to respondents originating from the African continent. The study argues that this finding may be explained by the fact that CSR may hold more developmental and cultural relevance to the relatively less developed and more collectivist African continent than the other continents which, may account for the higher perception of firms' engagement in CSR practices on the part of respondents from the African continent. Additionally, contrary to other studies, male students in Ghana, according to the results of this study, attached significantly higher importance to firms' engagement in CSR as compared to their female counterparts. This study argues that the finding may be due to the fact that males assume higher recognition and play more dominant roles within the social, political, and economic systems in Africa (Obbo, 1976; Mwale, 2002) and, as such, this may account for males being more assertive and expressive of their expectations of firms' engagement in CSR initiatives, especially since CSR in Africa exhibits appreciable linkages to the continent's social, political, and economic development.

Consistent with other studies discussed earlier, CSR perception was found to positively and significantly affect individuals' perception of CSR-performing firms as attractive employers. However, the demographic characteristics investigated in this study did not affect the level to which CSR perceptions of individuals translated into employer attractiveness. These results indicate that although CSR perceptions of students in Ghana translated into their attraction to CSR-practising firms as employers, this attraction did not vary significantly amongst respondents based on the investigated demographic characteristics. As such, students in Ghana who attach the same level of importance to CSR activities of firms are likely to express the same level of attraction to working with firms that practise CSR, in spite of differences in their age, gender, continent of origin, years of work experience, or the degree they are currently studying.

Theoretically, the findings of this study point to possible differences in gender predispositions toward CSR practices in Africa as compared to other continents. The study, however, points out that such gender-related variations may be understood by understanding gender dispositions that prevail within the context. As such, investigations

into CSR and related concepts in Africa must employ appropriate theoretical lenses that reflect gender dispositions within the African context.

Additionally, results of the study indicate that individuals' CSR perception had a positive and significant effect on employer attractiveness of CSR-practising firms, thus indicating that, students in Africa may consider CSR engagements of firms as an important attribute in deciding which firms to apply to or work for. Given that firms regularly employ from the pool of students graduating from universities, results of the study point to the fact that firms recruiting from campuses in Africa can disseminate information on their CSR performance in attracting qualified candidates from these campuses. Indeed, CSR-practising firms in Africa can employ CSR as part of their employer branding tools by highlighting their CSR engagements in their corporate communications such as on the career sections of corporate websites or in their "About the Company" information that accompanies their job adverts.

6. Limitations of the study

In terms of limitations of the current study, firstly, the items employed in measuring CSR perception in this study did not include internal CSR measures such as working conditions and employee skill-development opportunities. This exclusion may have affected the study's ability to measure the role of CSR dimensions relevant to a firm's job characteristics in determining the firm's employer attractiveness. It is possible that future studies can avoid this limitation by adopting CSR conceptualisations that explicitly include measures of job characteristics. Such studies could also increase their scope beyond that of the current study by including respondents who are workers but not students and possibly examining such respondents' willingness to switch jobs based on CSR performance of other firms.

Additionally, investigations of more complex personality orientations, for example those based on value systems of individuals, as well as more detailed investigation into the role of gender, in affecting the perceptions and response to CSR practices, may provide increased insights into CSR and related concepts within the African context.

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